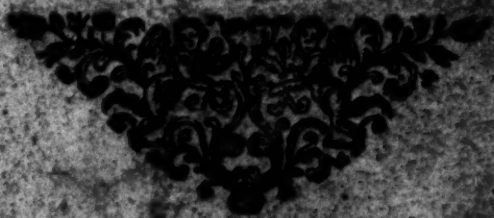


OF ASSURANCE
LOVE

A
SERMON

PREACH'D AT
DEPTFORD
IN
KENT.

BY ABRAHAM TAYLOR.



LONDON,

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REVELATION II. 17.

*To him that overcomes, will I give
to eat of the hidden manna, and I
will give him a white stone, and
on the stone a new name written,
which none knows but he who re-
ceives it.*

IT is a very great and distinguishing pri-
vilege, that any of the posterity of A-
dam, who have destroy'd themselves,
and render'd their condition desperate, by
sinning against God, should be recover'd from
their lost estate, and raised from the ruin
they have brought upon themselves. It is
only from the tender mercies of our God,
that the day-spring from on high visits any
of the children of fallen man. When Christ,
in a way of loving kindness, looks on any
of the unhappy seed of Adam, who are cast
out to the loathing of their persons, and lie
polluted in their blood, he knocks off their
setters, and girds them with gladness; he
gives them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy

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for mourning, and the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness. However, by reason of sin remaining in the best of Christians, their joys will often be damp'd, and their evidences of heaven clouded, so that they cannot expect always to be revived with the comfortable hope of that inheritance which is incorruptible, undefiled, and fades not away; but must expect sometimes to walk in darkness, and to see no light, tho' at the same time they rest on the arm of the Lord Jesus Christ, and stay themselves on him the great God of their salvation. It is only by the holy Spirit, witnessing with the spirits of Christians, that they can be assured of their interest in the joys and pleasures of the upper world; and whilst the Spirit indulges this privilege to them, they can grapple with severe afflictions, be joyful in great tribulation, and can encounter death, when it makes its approach, in the most terrible form, without fear or amazement.

The words which I have chose to insist on, are the conclusion of the epistle, which our exalted Redeemer dictated to the apostle John, his beloved disciple, in order to be sent to the church at Pergamos; and they are introduced with a command to give attention. "Let him that has an ear, hear what the Spirit says to the churches; To him that overcomes will I give to eat of the
hidden

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hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone, and on the stone a new name wrote, which none knows, except him who receives it.^a

This portion of scripture gives us the discriminating character of the persons, to whom the greatest blessings are promised. They are such as overcome, or true believers in Christ. Every Christian is a conqueror more or less: He must overcome the lusts and temptations of the age wherein he lives; he must subdue the latent corruptions that are in himself; he must contend for the glorious truths of the everlasting gospel, and must bear his testimony to God's holy law; he must wrestle against the principalities, and powers of the kingdom of darkness; he must slight all the flatteries of the world, and must take up his cross, and follow the captain of his salvation, who was made perfect thro' sufferings; he must deny himself, and with an undaunted courage must break thro' all rubs, which are laid in the way, to obstruct his march to the heavenly Canaan; and he must be constant in pressing forward to the courts of the heavenly Jerusalem, notwithstanding discouragements may rise from the imperfection of his own

^a Ὁ ἔχων τὴν ψυχὴν, ἀκουσάτω τί τὸ πνεῦμα λέγει ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις. τῷ νικῶντι δώσω αὐτῷ φαγεῖν ἀπὸ τοῦ θανάτου τοῦ νεκροῦμένου, καὶ δώσω αὐτῷ ψῆφον λιανὴν, καὶ ἐπὶ τῇ ψῆφῳ ὄνομα καινὸν γυναικὶν, ὃ οὐδὲς ἔγνω εἰ μὴ ὁ λαμβάνων.

frame,

frame, and difficulties from without may attend him, in the performance of his duty.

Such a person is the man who will receive a blessing from the God of his salvation: not one who in a cowardly manner conceals his sense of the great articles of religion, to get a little of the dross of the earth; not one who symbolizes with a vain world, to gain their empty and unavailing applause; and not one who avoids all sufferings, which might attend him, if he kept to his duty. Such creatures, tho' they may have their pride gratified here, will, unless they repent, another day, hear Christ pronounce those dreadful words to them, Depart from me you workers of iniquity, I know you not. Great then will be their confusion; but, on the other hand, great will be the joy of such as have overcome by the blood of the Lamb, and have kept the word of his testimony; they will, with congratulation, welcome their God and Saviour to his judgment seat, because they are to be forever with him. This, which can only be expected hereafter, might be sufficient to encourage any one to be faithful to Christ's cause, but such as will be so, are not left without supports here; nay they have the best blessings promised them.

One benefit promised in the text, to such as overcome, is a participation of Christ and his fullness; "I will give him to eat of the

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the hidden manna." The spiritual feeding on Christ by faith, is called eating manna; because the manna, which, like a morning dew, fell about the tents of the Israelites, was a type of Christ. It is called feeding on the hidden manna, because Christ in his glorious excellencies is hid from profane, ignorant, and irreligious sinners, who are insensible of his superlative beauty, and have no taste, to relish his sweetness. They who believe in Christ only have an experimental knowledge of his sweetness, because they feed on him by faith; this brings present comfort, and will end in eternal life: This he has told us, in the following words, "Whofo eats my flesh, and drinks my blood, has eternal life.^b" Such an one has eternal life, in the promise and foretastes of it, here, and will have it, in full possession, hereafter.

Another blessing promised to such as overcome, is absolution, or the pardon of sin; for this we are to understand by giving a white stone. Among the ancients, those who gave their judgment, as to life and death, did it by balloting, or by throwing into an urn, black ^c and white stones, with the name of the person, who had been under tryal, upon them; if the greater number of the stones were white, he was acquitted;

^b John vi. 54.

^c Mos erat antiquis niveis atrisque lapillis

His damnare reos, illis absolvere culpa.

Ovid.

if

if otherwise, he was condemn'd. The white stone of absolution is granted to a sinner, when he is enabled to plead the righteousness and infinite merit of Christ; then God mercifully accepts him, pardons his sins, declares him righteous, and absolves him from condemnation. When the white stone is thus given to a sinner, his state is changed; for of a guilty criminal he is made righteous, and passes from the death of a condemn'd state, to the life of a justified condition.

Another benefit promised to such as overcome, is the assurance of God's love; which is the new name, wrote on the white stone, which none know but such as receive it. It is a new name to all to whom it is given: the name of every sinner, from his birth, is a black apostate, a child of wrath, a rebel against God, a condemn'd traitor, and an heir of hell; but when he has the white stone given him, or when he is pardon'd and justified, he is a just person, a member of Christ, a child of God, and an heir of heaven. The new name, which is wrote on the white stone, is not legible to any, but to him who receives it; not but that skillful Christians may be better able to judge of dark deserted believers, than they themselves are, and may see ground to hope there is much grace in them, when they will not believe they have any; but no man

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can be assured of the salvation of another, tho' he may believe and hope it of him: Whereas when a Christian has the witness of the Spirit within himself, he may be assured, that his end will be peace, and his rest will be glorious.

I design, from the text I have chose, to discourse of the assurance of God's love, which is granted to believers, by the testimony of the holy Spirit; and my thoughts concerning this nice and arduous point, I shall humbly give in several propositions.

I. Christian assurance is a taste of the love of God, join'd with a persuasion, that he has good will towards us; and tho' it presupposes faith, yet it is not essential at all times to faith.

Assurance of salvation is a deep sense, or a lively taste of God's love, join'd with a firm persuasion of his good will towards us, whereby we are enabled to look back on what we are, and to see that God is our Father, that we are his adopted children, thro' Christ, and that he will save us with an everlasting salvation. Assurance differs from faith, tho' it presupposes it: There is often the faith of adherence and reliance in persons, who are so far from having assurance, that they walk in darkness, and see no light, but, on the other hand, are fill'd with gloomy fears and perplexing doubts, about their eternal state. God, speaking by the prophe,

B

Isaiah

♣ Ifaiah, has supposed that some might fear him, and obey Christ's voice, who yet walked in darkness, and were left without light; and thus he has spoke to such: "Who is there among you that fears the Lord, and obeys the voice of his servant, that walks in darkness, and has no light? let him trust in the name of the Lord, and stay upon his God." There can be no assurance where there is no faith; but there may be faith where there is no assurance.

I readily grant, that one sort of assurance is absolutely necessary to true faith, which is a full assurance of understanding, that Christ is actually sent of God, to seek and save sinners; that he is every way able to save them, and has actually wrought out their salvation in the best manner. It is ridiculous to think any can believe in Christ, as a Saviour, without being satisfied, he is appointed as such, by the God who was offended; that he is mighty to save all whom the Father gave him; and that he justly cry'd out with triumph, It is finished, before he breath'd out his Spirit into the hands of him who gave it, and sent him to complete mens salvation: But a Christian may be assured of all this, and may be willing to commit his soul to Christ as a mighty and faithful Redeemer, who can see no ground to conclude,

♣ Ifaiah i. 10.

that

that this mighty Saviour died for him in particular; and that he has actually a part or portion in the redemption, which he wrought out for finners.

I own, that some of the best writers among the glorious army of our reformers from popery, have given a wrong definition of faith, when they speak of it, as carrying in it its own evidence, which is no less than assurance. I do not say this to lessen their value; for none can value their memory more than I; and I am satisfied, their names will be as sweet ointment pour'd forth, when the remembrance of such, as resolve never to follow them in their work of faith, and labour of love, and yet can sneer at them, will rot in oblivion. The only reason I take notice of this is, that none may be drawn, by their authority, to think, there is no faith without assurance. It may perhaps be matter of wonder that persons of so much light should entertain such a misconception: The reason I take to be, partly, their zeal to refute the assertion of the papists, that Christians can only attain to a conjecture about the truth of their interest in Christ; and chiefly, their own experience, and the great strength of their faith; they themselves had great assurance for their encouragement, because they were raised up to do a great work for God in the world, and as they found it in their own spirits,

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they

they thought it might be with other persons.

Assurance does not consist barely in the faith of reliance, but it is faith, if I may so speak, sublimated, or raised up to a spiritual sense. Faith may be exercised on the rock of ages, whilst yet Christians, by reason of remaining darkness, may not be got above the fears of being overfet by the waves and billows of corruption and temptation, which beat upon them; but if by the good hand of God the Spirit upon them, their faith is enabled to gain a victory over slavish fears and unbelieving doubts, it is follow'd with assurance, and they can rejoice with joy unspeakable, and full of glory, because they receive the end of their faith, which is the assurance of their salvation: This is called the end of faith, by the apostle Peter, in the following passage, “^e Now for a season you are in heaviness, thro’ manifold temptations, that the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perishes, tho’ it be tried with fire, might be found to praise, and honour, and glory, at the appearing of Jesus Christ; whom having not seen you love, in whom, tho’ now you see him not, yet believing you rejoice with joy unspeakable, and full of glory, receiving the end, or ^f perfection, of your

^e 1 Pet. i. 6—9.

^f Κομίζομεθα τὸ τέλος τῆς πίστεως ὑμῶν, σωτηρίαν ψυχῶν.

faith,

faith, even the salvation of your souls." After the faith of Christians has been try'd, as gold in a furnace, they are sometimes brought to rejoice with a joy, which is ineffable, and full of glory; and when they have this joy, they have assurance, which is the end of their faith, and is salvation, as it were, in hand.

The prime work of justifying faith is to look to Christ, and to close with him; but assurance is the reflection of faith on itself, or faith looking back to a mystical union with Christ, and our justification by him. That faith which is absolutely necessary to salvation, is employ'd in relying on Christ; but assurance is our looking back on the blessedness of our state, by our having actually taken hold on Christ. When we do not distinguish between the direct and recollective acts of faith, we create endless intanglements to ourselves: The direct acts of faith, which are put forth, when a believer looks to Christ, receives him, and relies upon him, are essential to the being of faith, and are necessary to salvation; but the secondary, or recollective acts of faith, which are put forth, when a Christian is persuaded of his justification and adoption, and can see himself in a state of grace, are necessary to consolation. A man may be saved, who only exercises the direct acts of faith; but he cannot be assured of his salvation, without the secondary acts of it.

II. Assurance

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II. Assurance is a thing not impossible to be attain'd in this life.

1. That a Christian may in this life attain assurance, is evident, from the command in scripture, to press after it. This the apostle Peter ^s has charg'd on those, to whom he wrote; "Brethren, give diligence, to make your calling and election sure." His meaning is to this purpose; Be constant and diligent to lead a holy life, that you may know your election to be firm and immoveable, and your vocation to be true and real. This command is a proof, that we may know the sureness of our election, and the truth of our calling; and consequently, that we may know our selves to be in a state of salvation. The intrinsic stability of our election depends not on our faith or works; for if it did, it would be like a picture drawn on the loose sand, which every blast defaces: but it is impossible, that we can know ourselves to be chose and call'd, unless we shew forth the virtues of him who has chose and call'd us, in a holy and blameless conversation.

2. Our obtaining assurance is one end of God's revealing the greatest mysteries to us, and therefore it may be attain'd: This may be gathered from the following words of the apostle John; ^h "These things have I wrote to you, who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know you

^s 2 Pet. i. 10.

^h 1 John v. 13.

have

have eternal life." The end of the great apostle, in this writing, was, that they to whom he sent his epistle, might know, that Jesus Christ was the natural, eternal Son of God, by whom only they could have life and salvation; and one end of this stupendous and admirable discovery was, that they might be assured of their interest in that eternal salvation, which the mighty Redeemer had purchased for them. The end of God, in sending his Son, and revealing him effectually to us and in us, is not only that we may get to heaven, but that we may be assured we are actually travelling thither; if assurance were a thing absolutely impracticable, one end of God, in revealing his Son, would be lost, which is not to be supposed.

3. The intent of God, in giving so many gracious promises, and in confirming them by his oath is, that we may have assurance. God has added his oath to his promise, that he might put the truth of his merciful declarations out of question. The Scripture has assured us, that ⁱ "God being willing, more abundantly to shew the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, confirm'd it by an oath; that by two immutable things, wherein it was impossible for God to lie, we might have strong consolation;" or ^k "a firm, well grounded consolation." Now how could we attain to a firm, well

ⁱ Heb. vi. 17, 18.

^k ἵνα ἐν ἰσχύει παράκλησιν ἔχωμεν.

grounded

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grounded consolation, if we could get no higher than a conjectural certainty? This would make our consolation a mere shadow; would this ever quiet one who is seriously concern'd about his future state? Is this all the fruit that grows on the promises and the oath of God? Such a consolation would be rather delusive than firmly grounded; for our comfort can never be stable, till our fears of wrath and condemnation are vanquish'd, and till we come sensibly to know, that Christ is our Saviour.

4. The tendency of self-examination proves, that assurance may be attain'd in this life. If we can never know what we are, to what purpose should we be call'd upon to search our hearts, and to examine ourselves? As we may know, by the want of the fruits of the Spirit, that we are in a state of nature; so we may know, by our having them, that we are in a state of grace. If Christians can attain to the knowledge that they have grace, they may know they are in a state of salvation; but that they may know they are in a state of salvation, is plain from the many particulars, which the apostle John has declared in his first epistle, they may know, with relation to themselves: He has there assured us, that believers may know that they are ¹ united to God; that

¹ Hereby we know, that we are in him, 1 John ii. 5.

ASSURANCE.

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he ^m dwell in them, and ⁿ loves them; that they are ^o of him, and ^p know him; that they have ^q faith, and are ^r of the truth; and that ^s they love all who bear their Maker's image: If we may know all these things of our selves, we may know we have grace; and, consequently, may be assured, that we are in a state of salvation, and shall be completely saved at last.

We may know that we have a divine principle infused into us, by the workings of it in us; for where there is grace implanted in the heart, it will make itself visible in the actions of the life; so that it is no insuperable difficulty for us, to know what our state is, would we but exercise the faculty of consideration. Surely, if we examine our selves, we may know, whether God's glory is dearer to us than all things; whether we delight in conversing with Christ; whether heavenly meditations, and holy duties are more grateful to us than sinful

^m He which keeps his commandments, dwells in him, and he in him; and hereby we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit which he has given us. Ibid. iii. 24.

ⁿ We have known, and believed the love which God has to us. Ibid. iv. 16.

^o We know that we are of God. Ibid. v. 19.

^p Hereby we know that we know him, if we keep his commandments. Ibid. ii. 3.

^q He that believes on the Son of God, has the witness in himself. Ibid. v. 10.

^r We know that we are of the truth. Ibid. iii. 19.

^s By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God, and keep his commandments. Ib. v. 2.

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thoughts

thoughts and vain amusements; and whether there be light in our minds, gentleness in our wills, and warmth and sprightliness in our affections: There is no person but might know all this, would he seriously converse with his own spirit. When we find any thing of the new birth in us, we may know we are the children of the living God; and tho' this may not rise up to a full satisfactory assurance, yet it is the beginning of it, and shews it to be a thing attainable.

III. True Christian assurance is principally founded on the witness of the holy Spirit.

Assurance may very well be said to be founded, partly, on the testimony of a Christian's justification; for when a convinced, weary, and burden'd sinner stretches out the trembling hand of his faith, to lay hold on a bleeding, dying Jesus, and holds him fast, he begins to feel quiet, and meet with refreshment, and to have the load taken off from his conscience: To expect peace, without first doing this, is as absurd as to imagine a roof may be raised when no foundation has been laid. When a fainting soul looks to Christ with a heart full of sorrow and grief, Christ looks upon him with eyes full of love and compassion. When any one is brought to rely on Christ by faith, he has some testimony from the active exercise of his faith, that he is pardon'd and justified.

Assurance may also be justly said to be, partly,

partly, founded on the testimony of sanctification; for when any one finds that he is not so carnal as he was before; that his dross is burnt up; that his pollution is wash'd away; and that the bent of his heart is as much set on God and heaven, as it was once on sin and the world; this is a witness of his conversion to God. When a man is turn'd from darkness to light, from death to life, from sin to holiness, from uncleanness to purity, from bondage to liberty, and from carnal courses to delighting in spiritual things, a great change has pass'd upon him; and when he is sensible of this change, it is a testimony of his being in a state of grace.

The distinct testimonies of justification and sanctification are true and real; but they do not always carry in them a full evidence to satisfy the persons who have them; for many are justified and sanctified, who are far from being assured they are so; therefore there is need of a farther witness to render a Christian assured of his salvation; and that is the testimony of the holy Spirit: His testimony follows, and corroborates the testimony of justification and sanctification; these may be, where the Spirit does not sensibly bear witness; but his testimony is never afforded to such as are neither justified nor sanctified; for while sinners are not justified, they are in a state of condemnation, so that the Spirit of truth cannot bear witness to
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their absolution; and while they are unsanctified, they are contrary to any thing holy, so that the Spirit of holiness cannot testify to their purification. The Spirit's testimony does not precede justification and sanctification, but is subsequent upon them, and puts the one and the other out of doubt. The Spirit of God, in giving assurance to a Christian, does four things.

1. The holy Spirit gives a Christian a true insight into the treasures of the grace of God and the love of Christ. The Spirit gives him some view of the mercy of God the Father, in the freeness and richness of it, and brings him to know something of the height, and depth, and length, and breadth of that love which passes knowledge, as to the full comprehension of it: He sets Christ forth in all his fullness and glory; he makes him known to a believer, in the dignity of his person, as the great and supreme God, who, tho' equal to the Father in nature, yet voluntarily condescended to act in subjection to him, as his servant, and took upon him the form of a servant, or appeared as a man, a miserable man, that he might be in a capacity to rescue the posterity of man, who when he was in honour continued not: He represents him as sent of the Father, to seek and help such as are lost, as every way able to save them, and most willing to relieve them; He represents him as having, by the
most

most costly price, purchased their salvation; he lays him open to the view of faith, as groaning, bleeding, sighing, dying for sins not his own; as one who in the greatness of his strength trod the winepress of God's wrath alone, and without any partner wrought out for his people complete deliverance, the glory of which he only must therefore wear: He sets him forth in the infinite merit of his death, and in the power of his resurrection; that all who trust in the value of the sacrifice which he offer'd up as the great high priest of their profession, may, at the same time, shew their faith in him to be sincere, by their submitting to him as their King, and by bowing to the scepter of his righteous government.

2. The Spirit enables a Christian to plead his adoption before God with a filial confidence. The apostle Paul has told us, that "because we are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, enabling us to cry Abba, Father." When the holy Spirit stirs up one who believes in Christ, to cry to the Father of mercies, this is a certain fruit of the life of regeneration; and by this such a person may know he is adopted by God. When the Spirit is sent into the hearts of believers, they may, with a holy filial fear, address themselves to God, as a merciful Father, who having made them

! Gal. iv. 6.

knows

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knows their brittle frame; and who being acquainted with their frail composition, in all his dealings, remembers that they are but dust. Hypocrites may, with confident formality, call God their Father; but when a man calls God Father in sincerity, he must have faith in his promises, and must have his heart fill'd with love to him.

3. The Spirit bears witness with the spirit of a Christian. This the apostle Paul has told us in the following words: "The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirits; that we are the children of God." The Spirit himself, and not another, comes personally, and bears witness with our spirits, or with our renew'd part; that we actually stand in the relation of children to God. When a believer is absolved from all condemnation, and is justified and accepted of God, when the lines and features of the new creature are drawn in his soul; and when the image of God is restored in him, he has the witness of his justification and sanctification; and if he has the Spirit to ratify this double testimony, he has him to bear witness with his spirit, and a flood of consolation is pour'd into his soul. When the Spirit thus witnesses to the truth of a Christian's justification and sanctification, his evidence carries with it the utmost certainty; and he persuades and overpowers him to be-

" Rom. viii. 16.

lieve,

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lieve, that God has loved him with an everlasting love; and that Christ bore him on his heart, when he hung bleeding on the accursed tree.

4. The holy Spirit seals up to a Christian his interest in the love of God. The sealing of a Christian to the day of redemption, is appropriated to the Spirit, and his almighty agency is exerted in it. God, as the apostle Paul has told us, ^w “has sealed us, and has given the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts.” It is the holy Spirit, ^x “by whom we are sealed to the day of redemption.” We are ^y “sealed by the holy Spirit of promise, who is the earnest of our inheritance,” and ^z “God has given us the earnest of the Spirit.” The Spirit of God affixes a seal, and he affords the earnest of heaven; this double work is suited to the distinct faculties of a renew’d soul. When he affixes his seal, he shines upon the understanding of a Christian, in order to scatter his doubts, brighten his evidences, and make heaven sure to him. The impress of the Spirit’s seal is; soul be of good comfort, God purposed to save thee from eternity, Christ actually redeem’d thee, by dying on the cross, and I will never leave thee, till I have conducted thee to the land of rest: This stamp of the Spirit’s seal may be known by the matter it seals up to us, which

^w 2 Cor. i. 22.

^y Ib. i. 13, 14.

^x Eph. iv. 30.

^z 2 Cor. v. 5.

is no fancy, but the greatest reality, even the mercy of God the Father, and the compassionate kindness of God our Redeemer: When we are thus seal'd by the Spirit, he leaves us not to uncertainties, but works warm and lively apprehensions of the love of God and Christ in us, and so causes the clouds of our slavish fears to vanish and fly away. At the same time that the Spirit seals up the love of God to the intellectual faculties of a Christian, he gives him the earnest of the heavenly inheritance, which work refers to the will: This earnest of heaven is more than a pledge, for that is only given for a time, and may be redeem'd and took away; but an earnest is part of what is to be paid, or freely given: The earnest of heaven confirms the contract made between God and a penitent; and as it is a prelibation afforded to him at present of joys substantial and sincere, so it gives him the assurance of receiving much more, even joys divinely great and glorious. The earnest of the Spirit is not a bare persuasion wrought in a Christian's mind, that he shall go to heaven; but it is a communication to him of some drops of the sweetness which is there, that by feeling and tasting he may know what heaven is.

There is corruption remaining in the best of men; and therefore it is possible, after Christians have had the benefit of assurance, they

they may provoke God by their sins to hide the light of his countenance from them, and if so, their former light will make their dark night of despondency more disagreeable. Nay it too often falls out, that their assurance lifts them up, and that they graft spiritual pride upon bright discoveries of the love of God to them; so that they provoke the holy Spirit to withdraw himself, and to hide the light of his countenance from them. Assurance may thus be lost, and in this it differs from faith, which can never be utterly rooted out, after it is once implanted: But he who is favour'd with this earnest of heaven, is as sure of going to God, his exceeding joy, when the short span of his mortal life is measured out, as if he had already waded thro' death's dark flood, and had actually set his feet within the borders of that land of pure delight, which is very far off.

IV. True Christian assurance is to be judged of by the fruits it produces.

It highly concerns us to distinguish the Spirit of truth from the spirit of error, and to know the imperial coin of a gospel assurance from the counterfeit metal of an arrogant presumption: To this end, let us carefully weigh, and constantly carry in mind, three things, which will help us to distinguish the testimony of the Spirit of God from the craftiest delusions of Satan.

1. The assurance of salvation, which is
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from the Spirit, ever raises our esteem for Christ. It is in Christ that the platform of our redemption is laid, and the original draught of it is in him; therefore the clearer view we have of our salvation, the greater value we shall have for Christ, because the whole fabric of our salvation is built upon him. Whatever God does to us, or for us, in a way of mercy and grace, he does it to us and for us in Christ, or on his account. If we are chose of God to salvation, it is in Christ; if we are redeemed from the wrath of God, and the torments of hell, it is because Christ suffer'd for us, and bore away our guilt; if we are justified, it is for his righteousness sake; if we dye to sin, it is because he died; if we are raised from the grave of corruption, it is because he rose and revived; and if we have our salvation seal'd up to us, it is because he has taken possession of the heavenly mansions for us. The whole of our salvation in its glorious and beautiful contexture, is either framed in Christ, or wrought out for us by him; therefore the fuller assurance we have of this salvation, the more value we must have for Christ, the author and teacher of it. When the seal of the Spirit is set to the great charter of our salvation, to give us assurance of it, our esteem for our great incarnate God is heighten'd, in that we are made sensible, how much we need him, and that without him

him we are nothing, and can do nothing. Such as are assured of their salvation, are so far from remitting their dependence on Christ, that none make more use of him, and are more constant in their reliance on him, and more frequent in their recourse to his blood than they; for the same witness who assures them of salvation thro' him, lets them see, that without him they would be ruin'd for ever.

2. The assurance of salvation, which is from the witness of the Spirit, makes us more holy. We are seal'd to salvation by the holy Spirit, who cannot be supposed to encourage any looseness, which is contrary to his infinitely pure nature, but must needs quicken and prompt to greater holiness. There must be much faith and love, humility and fear, self-denial and uprightness, holiness and purity, circumspection and watchfulness, wherever the Spirit comes to dwell. He is infinite in purity, and will never take up his abode with one, whose heart is a receptacle of all pollution. Such therefore as boast of assurance, and yet can take their swing in sin, and conform in their practice to the ringleaders of all profaneness and profligacy, are vain and impudent pretenders, and are led captives by the Devil at his will. Assurance sets all a Christian's graces in a new and clearer light; it curbs and checks every thing contrary to the Spirit of God;

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and as it the earnest of heaven, it will make every one who enjoys it more heavenly, and consequently more holy. Such as are without assurance will move on towards heaven with a feeble pace and slow steps; but when they are assured of their salvation, fervor and vehemence, zeal and courage, love and patience, will fill their breasts, and they will, with enlargedness of heart, run in the way of God's commandments, and inspired with heavenly vigour, will pass on from strength to strength, till they appear before God, and set their feet on the eternal hills, where they shall be for ever in the presence of their glorified head.

3. The assurance of salvation, which is from the testimony of the Spirit, always makes us keep close to the scriptures; because a true gospel assurance ever comes to us, by something promised in scripture. The apostle Paul has plainly told us, that when we are seal'd, "we are seal'd by the holy Spirit of promise." When the Spirit seals up comfort, he always does it by fulfilling the truth of something promised in scripture; and without this he never works assurance: When he does this he takes some evangelical promise, sets it home on our hearts, and brings us under the comforting efficacy of it: therefore all raptures of joy and enlargements, which come only from

* Eph. i. 13.

injections

injections into the mind, and warm flashings of the fancy, without something promised in scripture to back them, are no better than diabolical delusions, enthusiastic freaks, or the effects of a crazy brain, and a disorder'd head. If men pretend to assurance, and what they call assurance leads them off from the written word of God, they are not led by the sure light of God's Spirit, but by the false fire of their own wild imaginations.

V. Assurance is afforded to Christians more at some seasons, than at others.

As all true assurance of the love of God is from the witness of the holy Spirit, it cannot be thought, that, he, a sovereign free agent, should be tied up, as to the time, in which he gives it, or as to the measure, according to which he bestows. It is in this case as it is in all cases, relating to the degrees of grace; the Spirit breathes as he pleases, and gives not an account of his matters to any one: as he makes some Christians superior in grace to others, and makes some eminent in one particular grace, and others more remarkable in another; so he bestows on some Christians higher measures of assurance, than he does on others, and affords the same Christian more of it at some seasons, than at others. As to the reasons of his acting thus, they are not to be demanded by us shallow short sighted creatures; for as it would be great conceit in us to attempt to direct infinite wisdom, so it would

would be insolent arrogance for us to say to an agent of infinite power, what dost thou? But tho' it is impossible for us to give an exact account of the times and seasons, in which the Spirit of God affords assurance; yet taking the scripture for our guide, and reflecting on what we meet with in our converse with Christians, we may mark out some seasons, in which believers are more under the sealing influence of the holy Spirit, than at others: and, for the generality, they may be said to be such as follow.

1. The holy Spirit often gives assurance to Christians, when they converse with God and Christ, in the ordinances of the gospel. There are comfortable seasons in which the heart of a Christian is made to burn within him, when he hears the glories of a crucified Saviour laid open to him, in the preaching of the gospel of reconciliation; he is enabled, in some measure, to say, Christ is the God of my salvation; he has in his keeping the keys of death and hell; he will pluck out the sting of the king of terrors, and will never suffer my lot to be cast in the land of darkness and despair. Under the ministry of reconciliation, when the promises of God are explained and enforced, a Christian is often by faith carried out, not only to lay hold on the promise, but to appropriate it to himself for his comfort and joy.

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Among all the ordinances of the gospel, none tends more to the promoting assurance, than that of the Lord's supper; there a believer lays a fresh hold on the promise and oath of God, to seal up the free pardon of sin, to all who plead the blood of his Son; and there the worthy receiver renews his engagement to be the Lord's; at such a season, assurance, in some measure, is afforded, and it is proportionable to the strength of faith, and the lively exercise of grace. When faith is strong, and grace is in act and lively exercise, a Christian may with joy draw water out of the wells of salvation; but if faith is faint, and grace weak, no wonder if ordinances prove like dry breasts, and wells without water. In the ordinance of the Lord's supper, Christ is represented, as made a curse in our stead, and a sacrifice in our place, to bear away our sins; and when we believingly receive the elements of bread and wine, we receive the seal of God's love, and a deeper sense of it is impressed on our hearts.

2. The Spirit often gives assurance to Christians, before, and after severe tryals.

Before severe tryals, God by his Spirit gives his favourites a taste of his love, to fortify them against the difficulties which they are called to encounter. When the Saviour of the world had heard a voice from heaven saying ^b "this is my beloved Son, in whom

^b Mat. iii. 17.

I am well pleased," he was presently call'd to a fore conflict with great and strong temptations; he had no sooner heard his Father proclaim his approbation of him, but he step'd upon a stage, where his righteous soul was to be vex'd with the assaults of an evil spirit; for when the voice had been utter'd from heaven, the evangelists assure us, that immediately Christ was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the Devil ^c. When our blessed Lord had been honour'd with the Father's solemn approbation, he had scarce time to breath, before a black scene of temptation open'd upon him: no sooner had the Father solemnly proclaim'd his entrance on the mediatorial work, and the Spirit come down upon him, but he was expos'd to the assaults of the author of evil: who not only would have drawn him to the sin of impatience, but insolently solicited subordinate, inferior worship, as the God of the lower world, from him, who, tho' in one capacity he was a man, yet in another, was the same Lord of thunders, who had cast from the heights of heaven, for rebellion against him, the impure apostate, who was then tempting him, and all the other hapless companions of his fall. As God gave the man Christ Jesus comfort, to prepare him for grappling with great

^c Mark i. 12. Matth. iv. 1.

temptations; so he gives such as are the followers of his Son, in faith and patience, assurance, to fit them for approaching trials; by this he smooths many a rough way; and by this he lightens many a heavy burden.

After severe trials God often gives his children a taste of his love, to make them sensible, that he was never unmindful of them, and that their enjoyment of present comfort may weigh down all their former sorrows: as God in a way of fatherly correction, makes his people, as the reward of their sins, drink of the wine of astonishment; so he bestows the wine of assurance to such as are of heavy hearts, that they may remember their misery no more; and that when their tryals are over, they may not be tempted to think, he ever forgot to be gracious to them.

3. The Spirit often gives assurance to believers under sharp afflictions; as assurance is afforded, before tryals, that Christians may not be overcome; and after they are try'd, that they may not question God's care; so it is afforded them sometimes, in the very season of trial, that they may not sink under their afflictions. When Christians are in a disconsolate state, then the Spirit conveys comfort into their hearts. Under sharp afflictions, believers are beat off from all things here below, and they find no relief in creatures; when it is thus,

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their hearts are enlarged after God; they desire that they may find a full overflowing satisfaction in him, and then they are often fill'd with the choicest comfort. Thus holy Job, under severe trials, utter'd the following noble declaration, "I know that my Redeemer lives, and that he shall stand, at the last day, on the earth; and tho' after my skin, worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God, whom I shall see for my self, and my eyes shall behold, and not another, tho' my reins are consumed within me." When all was dark with this worthy person from without, he had inward light, to discern his interest in the everliving Redeemer's love; he knew that when his soul left its earthly tabernacle, it would go to God his exceeding joy; and he was satisfied, that, tho' worms and putrefaction might consume his flesh, yet at the last day, he should awake and rise, and see God in his own nature, for his unspeakable joy and delight.

4. The holy Spirit often gives assurance to Christians in a time of persecution. The Spirit of God is not only given to sufferers, as a spirit of life, but as a spirit of glory; to this purpose the apostle Peter address'd himself to his companions in tribulation; "If you are reproach'd for the name of

Job xix. 25, 26, 27.

1 Pet. iv. 14.

Christ,

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Christ, happy are you, for the Spirit of glory and God rests upon you." All Christians have the Spirit as he is a renewing, quickening, and purifying Spirit; but all have him not as he is the Spirit of glory; as he is thus, he is promised, in a special manner, to such as suffer for confessing Christ, and he rests upon them; he so elevates their faith, that they have a transporting view of the superlative glory of the other world, which fills them with a glorious joy. It was a view of heaven, that made the great law-giver of Israel, at his first setting out as the deliverer of the seed of Jacob, choose rather to be accounted a brother to such as were reckon'd slaves, than to be call'd the kinsman, or nephew to the king of Egypt: When he forsook the pleasures and gaiety of a rich court, for the sake of choosing the reproach of Christ, it was because he saw, by faith, him who is invisible to sense, and had a respect to the recompence of reward^f.

5. The Spirit often affords assurance to believers, when he calls them to perform some eminent service for him. There is some eminent, and more than ordinary exercise of faith and love, which God calls every believer to, at one time or other; if such an one omits obedience to God, in

^f Heb. xii. 24—28.

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this trying point, he obscures the light of his grace, and destroys the lively sense of his comfort. One reason why many walk in darkness all their days, is, they have not been faithful to God, when he put their faith and obedience to the test; which has brought it about, that they never afterwards could recover their loss, with respect to comfort. On the contrary, if a believer cheerfully and readily hearkens to the voice of God, when he is called to some difficult service, he generally receives from God a special and peculiar expression of favour. Those excellent persons, who were made use of by the king of Sion, to begin the great work of reforming the church, from the corruptions of popery, might, if they had follow'd the reasonings of flesh and blood, have sat down with this thought, that it was very unlikely that a few poor obscure monasticks could oppose the whole antichristian world; but they were far, very far from taking up with such plausible reasonings; but on the contrary, setting themselves in the front of God's battel, they boldly founded a retreat from the tents of the man of sin; and they generally had such high measures of assurance of the love of God, that consulting their own frame of spirit and their experience, they were ready to imagine, that faith always carried in it its own evidence: This was indeed a
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mistake in them, but it was what they scarce would have run into, had not they been bless'd with high measures of assurance.

6. The Spirit often gives assurance to believers at the time of death. It is hardly possible, that a poor weak mortal can triumph over his last and his great enemy, were it not for the assurance he has, that his temporary pains will be follow'd with joy unspeakable. When death is casting down a Christian's tabernacle of clay, when his strength fails, when his spirits flag, when his nerves shake, when his tongue falters, when his joints tremble, and when a cold damp bedews his brows, what is it can enable him to triumph and rejoice? but an assurance that when his spirit takes its flight, it will be safely lodged in the hands of his merciful Redeemer, who has divested death of its sting, and strip'd the grave of all its terrors. Though the Spirit often gives assurance to Christians at death, yet all have not this privilege; for some, as we may with charity judge, have, not without doubts and fears, taken their flight for the happy land, where there will be no more sorrow, nor crying, nor pain; some and that the greatest part of Christians resign up their spirits to Christ, firmly trusting in him, but without raptures of triumph; whilst others, with a prosperous gale, and with souls full spread, launch without

without the least fear into the wide ocean of eternity, and with songs of triumph in their mouths, leave this world of sorrow, to take possession of the realms of joy, rest, and peace. Of all persons, they who have laid down their lives for the sake of Christ and his gospel, have been favour'd with the highest degrees of assurance at their death: this has fitted them for encountering death in its most terrible form; this has enabled them not only to smile on the ax, the gibbet, and the halter, but has spirited them to endure the severest lingering death, without shrinking. They who have had a strong degree of assurance, that their souls would soon be with that blessed Redeemer, for whose sake they willingly parted with their lives, counted the torturing racks, to be as it were a bed of down, and regarded the devouring flames no more than if they had been a refreshing bath. They counted their sufferings as nothing, because they regarded the glory that would follow, and they have bore the most severe pains, that the malice of hell's emissaries could inflict upon them, as if their strength had been that of stone, and their bodies had been brass; all this was from a certain assurance, that over racks, and thro' fires, they were going to be for ever with the Lord.

VI. A constant and uninterrupted assurance is not consistent with a state of imperfection

fection and trial, and therefore is not to be expected by Christians.

There can be none sure so foolish as to imagine, that they can be entirely free from sin, while they carry about with them a body of sin and death. As long as sin dwells in our mortal bodies, it will, by its frequent stirring, and its unruly motions, damp our joys, and obscure our evidences for heaven, so that we can never expect constantly and uninterruptedly to enjoy the blessing of assurance; Besides, could we always be assured of our interests in the love of Christ, we should not need to be found in the practice of many duties, which are required of us; what need would there be of trying our selves; or indeed, what room would there be for it, if we were always to know what we are? There would be no occasion for watching against temptations, if we were to know beforehand, we shall overcome them; and we should not find our selves under the necessity of renewing daily our work of repentance, could we be persuaded, that sin would not bring us under the frowns of God's fatherly anger. Uninterrupted assurance is no more to be attained to in this life, than absolute perfection; to pretend to it, only shews, that men can take up with fancy instead of faith, and can please themselves with an arrogant presumption, as if it were gospel assurance.

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The APPLICATION.

1. If assurance is not essential to the nature of saving faith, then they greatly confound the minds of weak Christians, who blend faith and assurance together. It is often seen that persons doubt of the sincerity of their faith, because of their want of assurance; this is from their having entertain'd a crude conceit, that wherever there is faith there must be assurance; a little conversation amongst those, whom we may charitably judge to be good Christians, would, one would think, convince persons of the folly of this: were the case so, no Christian would ever have any doubts; but as experience tells us, that many are bow'd down with desponding thoughts, who from their souls desire to stay themselves on Christ, so the most elevated Christians are, at times, not without their cares and fears.

2. If all true assurance makes such who have it, value Christ, if it renders them more holy; and if it keeps them close to the scriptures, then all pretences to assurance, without these marks, are to be disregarded. They are wretchedly infatuated, who pretend to elevated communion with God, in the perfection of a contemplative life, or in internal prayer, or inward martyrdom,

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tyrdom, or whatever swelling words of vanity they invent, and at the same time neglect Christ, by whom only we can have communion with God. He that will pretend to go to God, without the interposure of Christ, will have no communion with him, as the God of all grace, but will meet him in the fury of his wrath. If any pretend to assurance, and yet are not holy and blameless in their lives, their pretences are to be despised; for what fellowship can there be between light and darkness, or between God and Belial? If others pretend to the same, and yet prize raptures, injections, or the like, to the written word, they are to be pitied as persons disorder'd in their heads, or detected as cheats and impostors. Let us not hearken to the whisperings of erroneous spirits, lest we depart from the rock of our salvation, take a lawless liberty in sin, or go off from the sure word of prophecy; but let us listen to the Spirit of truth, that he may, as a comforter, abide with us for ever; that he may shed abroad his love in our hearts, and that we may rejoice in the assured expectation of the glory of God.

3. If the Spirit dispenses the blessings of assurance in a sovereign way, then Christians ought to leave this matter to his wise disposal, and when they enjoy his favours, they

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should cherish his motions, and prize their privilege. Many Christians are uneasy, that their evidences are not so clear as those of others, and they are concerned, lest they should not die with as much triumph, as they have known some have; this may, perhaps, take its rise from an honest desire to glorify God in life and at death; but as the lusts of the mind are too apt to entwine themselves, with the graces of the Spirit's working, it is well, if in such eager and uneasy wishes, spiritual pride and glorying in the flesh, do not too much twine with a desire of glorifying God. We should be much in prayer to the Spirit of God, that he would make us more holy; but we ought to leave matters to him, as to what degrees of hope and assurance he will bestow upon us.

4. If we desire assurance, we ought to take the utmost care, to do nothing that may grieve the Spirit, and provoke him to withdraw himself, and to be gone. To this end, let us not give up our selves to sensuality and earthly mindedness; let us be exceeding careful, not to fall into an unwary, uncircumspect walking; let us never spare and harbour spiritual lusts; and let us guard against a legal pharisaic spirit; or that spiritual pride, which puts us upon endeavouring to be partakers with Christ, in the glory

ry of our salvation: If we do not watch against these things, which are highly offensive to the Spirit, we shall find they will be the sorrowful causes of his withdrawment from us, and of his leaving our feet to stumble on the dark mountains of gloomy fears, uncomfortable doubts, and unwelcome despondencies.

5. If we desire assurance, let us be frequent in trying our selves. If we would know what we are, we must examine our selves. If we are in a state of sin, we should desire to know it, that we may be warn'd of our danger. If we are in a state of reconciliation, we should desire to know it, that we may reap the comfort of it. When Christians sit down to converse with their own hearts, it is seldom that their search is without success; when they are cold, the heavenly fire begins sometimes to burn; and when they are most in the dark, the divine light shines into their souls, and cheers them with the glimmerings of the perfect day. We should try our selves, and then we shall experience, that when we are most solicitous to know what we are, the Spirit will make known the naked truth to us, with respect to our state and frame.

6. If we desire assurance, we should often plead the promise of pouring forth the Spirit. There is such a promise standing on record, in the new testament; for God

has said, “² I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh.” The fulfilling of this promise we should plead; for tho’ in a higher sense, it belonged to the apostles, and the first preachers of the gospel, who were divinely inspired, yet it was not confined to them, but belongs, in a lower measure, to ordinary believers. As under the old testament, believers were to pray for the incarnation of the promised Messias; so Christians, under the gospel œconomy, are to pray for the pouring forth of the Spirit: we should often plead this promise with God, and should give him no rest, till we see the accomplishment of it in our own souls.

7. If we desire assurance, let us multiply the direct acts of faith. None without a successive flux of spiritual life, can renew the direct acts of faith; but this Christ will never deny to such as believingly depend on him. A Christian ought to do over again, what he did, when he first believed; for faith, by the repetition of every direct act, tends towards assurance. When a man first believes, he stays the weight of his soul on Christ; when he feels such a burden on himself, as he cannot bear, and sees a depth of misery under him, into which his guilt will sink him, he relies on Christ, as the only person that can bear him up under his burden, and can keep him from falling into the pit of destruction: this direct act of faith

is put forth by every one, when he first believes in Christ, and the oftner it is renew'd, the more the vigour of faith is increased, and the nearer it approaches to assurance. When a Christian repeats his dependence on Christ, he may hope that whatever tumblings and tossings, reelings and staggerings, he may have, yet in all the earthquakes of partial unbelief, with which he may be shook, he shall keep his standing on the rock of ages, and shall not be so moved, as to be wholly thrown off it. Whatever promise we may have found to be a particular support to our souls, when we first believed; let us repeat the actings of faith on Christ in that promise, and take a faster hold of it, till we can see our title to heaven to be firm and immoveable.

8. If we desire assurance, let us labour after higher degrees of holiness and purity, in heart and life. The farther sin is driven from the heart, the nearer the Spirit, as a comforter, will come; the more corruption dies in our souls, the more will he refresh us with the visitations of his mercy; and the more severe we are in mortifying the desires of the flesh, and in crucifying the lusts of the mind, the more sensible will he make us of our part and portion in a blessed eternity. Assurance of salvation is inconsistent with the presumptuous commission of sin, or the wilful omission of known duty; there-

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therefore if we are presumptuous sinners, or wilful neglecters of our duty, we can never look for the comfortable beams of God's love, but must expect to lie under the clouds of his displeasure.

9. If we desire assurance, let us grow in the grace of humility. Assurance is preserved by a spiritual growth in humility, but it is lost, if we proudly boast of our grace. When we have got over tryals, and have attain'd comfort, we must walk humbly, lest we fall into smarter soul afflictions; and when we have overcome temptations, we must distrust our selves, lest we are surprised with temptations stronger and more violent. Too many Christians, when the night of desertion ends in the light of consolation, and when they have overcome temptations, grow secure, proud and self-confident, this is the reason, why they again are left to grope in the dark, and why their strength fails, when they are afresh assaulted. Faith is not more necessary to the being of assurance, than humility is to the preservation of it. Humility is the prelude to comfort, honour, and conquest; but pride, when it is indulged, is ever a prologue to darkness and desertion, and a haughty spirit, where it is kept up, and is not subdued, is too sure a presage of a fall.

10. If we desire assurance, let us, relying on the aid and assistance of the blessed Spirit,
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put our graces into act and lively exercise. Let us be always attentive to the Spirit's motions, and let us never harden our selves by unbelief, lest we have him to resolve, that we shall not enter into that rest of faith, which is preliminary to an eternal rest. Let us be frequently stirring up our selves, and all that is within us, to take hold on Christ, and then we may wait for his merciful visits, with grace in its elevation, and before we are aware, our souls may become like the chariots of a willing people. Let us be often saying thus to our selves; peace, thou troubled ocean of our desponding thoughts; silence, you waves of unbelief, tumble not about in our breasts, to disturb our inward quiet; fly open you everlasting doors of our souls, and let all their immortal powers be prepared for the reception of the Prince of peace: If we can get into such a frame, we may hope, that the King of glory and of grace will enter into our souls, attended with all his train of spiritual blessings, at whose approach our unbelieving fears will vanish, our faith will be strengthen'd, our hopes will be enlarged, and the Spirit will be plentifully pour'd forth upon us, as a sealing, comforting Spirit. When it is thus with us, we shall have the foretaste of those joys divinely great, which will delight us, when we shall come to stand in our lot among the righteous, and of those pleasures grown to full

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full perfection, which will regale us, when we shall take our place at the right hand of Christ, cloathed with the white robes of innocence and immortality.

Now to the Father of mercies, who chose us to salvation, to the Lamb upon the throne, who has redeem'd us by his blood, and who only can keep us from falling, till he presents us before the presence of his glory, to our exceeding joy, and to the Comforter, the holy Spirit, who only can seal us up to the day of redemption, and can afford us the foretaste of eternal glory; be all honour, power, and praise, ascribed, henceforth, and for evermore. Amen.

F I N I S.

